

**METHOD OF EXCHANGING USER MESSAGES AMONG INTERACTIVE
DISK PLAYERS**

FOREIGN PRIORITY

[0001] The present invention claims priority under 35
5 U.S.C. 119 on Korean Application No. 10-2003-016628 filed March
17, 2003; the contents of which are incorporated by reference in
their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

10 [0002] The present invention relates to a method of
exchanging user messages among interactive disk players through
a server.

Description of the Related Art

[0003] As recording media technology advances, high-
15 density optical disks capable of recording large amounts of
digital data have become available, which allows easy
distribution of digital contents using the digital recording
media.

[0004] The standardization of interactive disks,
20 wherein auxiliary data related to the playback of A/V data

recorded on a disk (control or additional information referred to as ENAV data) is recorded on the same disk as html (hyper-text markup language) or jpeg data files and at the request of a user the ENAV data is reproduced along with the related A/V data, has been progressing rapidly. It is expected that the standardization of such interactive disks will promote the distribution of digital contents.

[0005] Users watching interactive disks storing the same title may possibly desire to exchange opinions regarding the title. In this perspective, it is necessary to support the exchange of user messages among interactive disk players through a server.

[0006] To allow the exchange of opinions, enquiries, and responses about the same title, it is required that the playback position of the disks that are being played by individual players be identical. In other words, the playback of the interactive disk players needs to be synchronized.

[0007] To this end, the disk player of a new user who does not belong to a group of users who simultaneously started the playback of a title under the control of a server should play the title from the playback position of the user group based on playback position and time information provided by the server, not from the beginning.

[0008] The synchronized playback of the title makes it possible for the users to exchange messages regarding the scene that is being currently played but the new user should skip some part of the title for the synchronization.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] It is an object of the present invention to provide a method that allows the exchange of user messages regarding an arbitrary scene of a title that is being
5 individually played by a plurality of interactive disk players.

[0010] A method of exchanging user messages among interactive disk players in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention comprises the steps of (a) receiving a user message from a first interactive disk player and storing the
10 received user message, (b) receiving a message request from a second interactive disk player, and (c) comparing playback time included in the message request with playback time included in the stored user message and sending the stored user message to the second interactive disk player depending on the comparison
15 result.

[0011] A method of exchanging user messages among interactive disk players in accordance with another embodiment of the present invention comprises (a) receiving and storing a user message that was sent from a different interactive disk
20 player and received by and stored in an external server from the external server by sending a message request to the external server, and (b) comparing playback time included in the stored user message with the time that has elapsed since the start of the playback of an interactive disk and outputting the stored
25 user message for displaying the message depending on the comparison result.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] The above features and other advantages of the present invention will be more clearly understood from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0013] FIG. 1 illustrates a system in which the present invention may be advantageously embodied;

[0014] FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic diagram of an embodiment of a method of exchanging user messages among interactive disk players in accordance with the present invention;

[0015] FIG. 3 illustrates the frame format of a message exchanged between an interactive disk player and a content server; and

[0016] FIG. 4 illustrates a schematic diagram of another embodiment of a method of exchanging user messages among interactive disk players in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0017] In order that the invention may be fully understood, preferred embodiments thereof will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[0018] FIG. 1 illustrates a system in which the present invention may be advantageously embodied. The system comprises a plurality of DVD players 100_x capable of playing interactive DVDs, a content server 300 that provides auxiliary contents related to the interactive DVDs played by the DVD

players and that allows the exchange of user messages among the DVD players, and a network 200 that serves as a data route between them.

[0019] FIG. 2 illustrates a schematic diagram of an embodiment of a method of exchanging user messages among interactive disk players in accordance with the present invention.

[0020] If a first user requests playback of an interactive DVD by loading the DVD into a first DVD player 100₁, the first DVD player 100₁ starts the playback of the DVD after reading ENAV data recorded thereon or receiving ENAV data thereof from the content server 300 and storing the ENAV data in an internal memory (E1).

[0021] The interactive player 100₁ keeps track of the passage of playback time using a timer. The playback operation is as described below.

[0022] As the interactive DVD is reproduced, A/V data recorded thereon is buffered in a buffer and the buffered A/V data is decoded by an A/V decoder and outputted as an A/V signal. During the A/V data decoding, specific ENAV data related to the A/V data being decoded among the whole ENAV data stored in the internal memory is decoded simultaneously and outputted as a video signal, which will be mixed with the video signal of the A/V signal. This process enables the first user to see the main A/V data of the DVD title and related auxiliary data simultaneously.

[0023] During the reproduction, the DVD player 100₁ sends a message request to the server 300 periodically. The

message request includes the ID of the disk that is currently being played, a user ID, and the time that has elapsed since the start of the playback (hereinafter referred to as relative time). The message request may further include a playback
5 region, a used language, a user age, and user sex as user grouping information, depending on the information option selected by the user ahead of the playback.

[0024] Each time the server 300 receives a message request, the server 300 checks if a message frame including the
10 same disk ID (or title ID) and group information as the message request has been received from other DVD players. If so, depending on the type of the message frame, the server 300 sends the message frame to the requesting player, i.e., the first DVD player 100₁ immediately or determines whether to send the message
15 frame to the first DVD player 100₁ based on the result of the comparison of the relative time included in the message frame with the relative time included in the message request.

[0025] If the first user enters a message inquiring about a particular scene of a movie that he/she sees (e.g., the
20 name of an actor/actress or shooting location) during the reproduction and request operation (E2), the first DVD player 100₁ adds to the message the relative time i.e., the time that has elapsed since the playback start (T1 in FIG. 2), that has been kept track of by the internal timer, grouping information,
25 and the message type. The message type is determined automatically or by the user input and includes a question, a response, a comment, etc. In this example, the type of the message is a question.

[0026] FIG. 3 illustrates an example of a user message frame constructed this way.

[0027] Receiving the message frame sent by the first DVD player 100₁ through the network 200 (E3), the content server 300 stores the received message frame in its database. Each time a message request is received from a DVD player, the content server 300 searches the database for the stored message frame and sends the stored message frame to the requesting DVD player. If the user ID included in the message request is the same as the user ID included in the stored message frame, the content server 300 does not send the message frame to the requesting DVD player since the message request and the message frame were created by the same user. Otherwise, depending on the type of the message frame, the server 300 sends the message frame to the requesting DVD player immediately or determines whether to send the message frame to the requesting DVD player by comparing the relative times of the message request and the message frame.

[0028] If a second user having the same grouping information as the first user starts playback of the same DVD title using a second DVD player 100₂ some time (T2 in FIG. 2) after the first user started playback (E4), the second DVD player 100₂ reproduces the A/V data and the related auxiliary contents and sends a message request to the content server 300 periodically, like the first DVD player 100₁.

[0029] Receiving the message request from the second DVD player 100₂, the content server 300 searches its database for a message frame having the same disk ID and grouping information as the received message request and examines the type of the

message frame. If the type is either a response or a comment, the content server 300 sends the message frame to the requesting DVD player. (i.e., the second DVD player 100₂) immediately.

[0030] If the type of the message frame corresponds to
5 a question, the content server 300 compares the relative time included in the message frame and the relative time included in the message request. If the relative time of the stored message frame is shorter than or equal to the relative time of the message request, the content server 300 sends the message frame
10 to the requesting DVD player. In the example of FIG. 2, the type of the message created by the first user is a question and therefore the second DVD player 100₂ receives the message created by the first player 100₁ some time (T1) after the second DVD player 100₂ started playback (E5).

15 [0031] The second DVD player 100₂ displays the user message contained in the received message frame in a window other than the window in which the title is being displayed (E6). The second user, therefore, can see the question made by the first user at the same (or at least nearby) scene where the
20 first user made the question, whereby the second user can easily understand the intent of the question.

[0032] If the second user wants to answer the question of the first user and requests a response, the second DVD player 100₂ displays a response window and receives the response of the
25 second user. The second DVD player 100₂ constructs a response message frame using the inputted message (E7).

[0033] The response message frame also includes the disk ID and grouping information as was described above. The

type of the message frame corresponds to a response. In addition to the received user message, the message included in the question message frame is included in the response message frame. The response message frame is transmitted to the content
5 server 300 through the network 200 (E8).

[0034] Receiving the response message frame, the content server 300 stores the response message frame in its database and then sends it to the DVD players issuing a message request users of which belong to the same user group. Since a
10 response message frame is supposed to be transmitted to a requesting DVD player immediately, the response message frame is transmitted to the first DVD player 100₁ when the first DVD player 100₁ issues a message request (E9).

[0035] Receiving the response message frame, the first
15 DVD player 100₁ outputs the user message contained in the message frame in a message window (E10). The user message includes not only the response inputted by the second user but also the question that was made by the first user and thus the question and the response are displayed together in the window. The first
20 user, therefore, can easily understand what question is associated with the response though the current playback position (about T1+T2) does not coincide with the playback position when the question was made (T1).

[0036] Although playback times of individual DVD
25 players are not the same, users of the DVD players are able to synchronize their question with a playback scene and to receive a response regarding the question by using the message exchange method described thus far.

[0037] Messages that are irrelevant to questions or responses regarding a DVD title (e.g., an announcement or notice to be sent to the group of users who are watching the DVD title) are sent to the content server 300 with the type of the messages set to 'a comment'.

[0038] A message frame the type of which is a comment is sent to the related DVD players immediately on request without regard to the relative time.

[0039] FIG. 4 illustrates a schematic diagram of another embodiment of a method of exchanging user messages among interactive disk players in accordance with the present invention.

[0040] In this embodiment, when to send a question message frame to users is not controlled by the content server 300 but controlled by the individual DVD players 100_k.

[0041] The content server 300 sends all message frames that have been received and stored (E3) to requesting DVD players irrespective of the type of the message frames (E5).

[0042] A DVD player that receives a message frame examines the type of the message frame and immediately displays the received message frame that corresponds to a response or a comment in a message window. If the received message frame corresponds to a response, the DVD player keeps comparing the relative time included in the message frame with the current playback time that has been kept track of by the timer until the two values become identical.

[0043] If the relative time included in the message frame becomes equal to or exceeds the current playback time, the

DVD player displays the user message included in the message frame in a message window (E6).

[0044] The remaining steps E7 through E10 are the same as was described above with reference to FIG. 2.

5 [0045] The method of exchanging user messages among interactive disk players in accordance with the present invention allows users watching the same DVD title individually to exchange opinions about the DVD title with one another in a way that the opinions can be synchronized with the scenes of the
10 title.

[0046] While the invention has been disclosed with respect to a limited number of embodiments, those skilled in the art, having the benefit of this disclosure, will appreciate numerous modifications and variations therefrom. It is intended
15 that all such modifications and variations fall within the spirit and scope of the invention.